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Senate

LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I am pleased to voice my support for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and for the Reed amendment that I cosponsored to S.2020, the tax reconciliation bill. The Reed amendment would have fully funded LIHEAP in fiscal year 2006 and would have paid for the increased funding with a temporary tax on the windfall profits of major oil companies.

The Senate fiscal year 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill took an important first step toward providing adequate LIHEAP funds by including \$2.183 billion for the program for next fiscal year. This is a good starting point.

However, \$2.183 billion represents only a very slight increase over fiscal year 2005 levels and is likely not enough to meet the needs of LIHEAP beneficiaries in the coming winter.

For this reason, I have worked to find ways to increase funding for the LIHEAP program and to do so in a manner that is fiscally responsible. The

Reed amendment would have added \$2.92 billion to the LIHEAP program and paid for this increase by taxing the windfall profits of major oil companies.

Some have criticized this windfall profits tax. Yet I believe that a temporary, limited tax on the windfall profits of energy companies is a reasonable way to help the least fortunate among us pay for their home energy needs.

Indeed, I believe that the country's oil producers can afford to help pay for LIHEAP. Last month they posted record profits. ExxonMobil reported that their profits rose 75 percent, and in just 3 months they made \$9.92 billion in profit. Similar record profits have been reported by all of the major integrated oil companies. Some of this increase in profit is due to oil prices that started to rise this summer even before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the gulf coast. After the hurricanes, though, the price of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other refined oil products soared.

Our Nation is still struggling to recover from the disasters along the gulf coast. All Americans have had to make sacrifices as a result. This winter the country is facing another crisis, record energy prices and associated increased household heating bills.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, consumers who heat their homes with natural gas prices--about 55 percent of U.S. households--are expected to see their heating bills rise by 48 percent this winter. Those who heat with oil will pay 32 percent more, those who heat with propane will pay 30 percent more, and those who heat with electricity will pay 5 percent more.

These increases will take the greatest toll on the least fortunate among us. Low-income Americans will have a harder time heating their homes and may turn their heat down dangerously low in hopes of being able to pay their monthly bills.

That is why the LIHEAP program is so important. LIHEAP provides vital home energy assistance to low-income families to help them weatherize their homes and pay their energy bills.

The Reed amendment would have asked the oil companies that have

profited so much from recent rising energy prices to help ease the burden of this winter's high prices.

I am pleased with the approach taken by the Reed amendment because I believe that we should try to pay for increases in spending. I have been uncomfortable supporting some previous amendments to increase funding for the LIHEAP program because they did not find a way to pay for the increased spending.

Senator *Reed* has found a way not only to fully fund this vital program, but to pay for it as well.

Unfortunately, Senator *Reed's* amendment was not accepted by the full Senate during consideration of the tax reconciliation bill. The amendment needed 60 votes to overcome a point of order and received only 50.

We will keep trying though.

The LIHEAP program serves a vital function in helping as many as 5 million low-income households who need a bit of help paying their energy bills or weatherizing their homes. I'm pleased to have been a cosponsor of the Reed amendment and I will continue to look for ways to increase funding for the LIHEAP program.